

March 15, 1990 LTE
/CW/Johnstone

(Progressive, JAN 90) "...the two Cold War blocs...were, after all, formed in the first place, in large part, to keep Germany divided. However, NATO has always called for reunification of Germany within the Western camp. In the 1950s, when the Soviet Union appeared to be willing to negotiate a German settlement, Soviet overtures were rejected by the West for the sake of maintaining NATO. The one thing Moscow would never accept was to facilitate the reunification of Germany as a part of an anti-Soviet alliance."

Till now! At least, though Gorbachev denies it, that is where events seem to be heading. And US officials have convinced themselves that the SU will prefer this to the prospect of a unified neutral Germany--which could not be kept from rearming in the long run, even if it started as "demilitarized."

Why not accept it earlier? Was this an historic "error" by the SU? Whereas the US preferred the CW to a neutralized, demilitarized Germany (which might have allied to the SU?), the SU preferred the CW to Germany within NATO. Yet if the SU were willing to accept this, presumably it would have been willing to forego control over East Europe. (Was Khrushchev at all ready for this, before Hungary? Were others?)

In Vietnam, both sides preferred to continue the--stalemated--war rather than to end it on the other's terms: though the majority of the people would surely rather have preferred--with reason--to have ended it on either set of terms than to see it continue. (They didn't have the opportunity of the Nicaraguan people to achieve peace through an election). (The US was certainly not ready to accept the results of an election: which would at least have put Communists in the government, if not in control. Thus, the US sabotaged the scheduled 1956 election, which would also have brought reunification. Would the Communists later have accepted an election in which they could participate freely? Probably so: perhaps in hopes, corresponding to US expectations and fears, of achieving total control eventually. US demands for a settlement excluded Communist participation in the Saigon regime.

Vietnam was a case where the gulf between the preferences of the people and the ruling elites of both sides, the ruler's preference on both sides for stalemated war over an achievable peaceful settlement, and the willingness of elites on both sides to accept, support and implement their ruler's preference, introduced me to pessimism about our species' chance of survival.

The issue of survival is posed by the existence of the same phenomena with respect to the nuclear arms race, and to its matrix, the Cold War. And just as with Vietnam, it could be argued that a

peaceful resolution, on either's terms, would not only have been preferred by the publics on both sides but would have been better, on balance, for the conflicting regimes themselves.

Yet there were disadvantages to both regimes in ending the CW, which are now appearing. For the US, it means a decline in influence in West Europe (and perhaps, resulting trade barriers, or competition: a defection from US multinational oil distributors, for example, to direct dealings with Middle East oil producers, or even to much greater use of SU oil and gas. A major function of the CW may have been to preclude both of these. Ferguson, in the current Socialist Review, says detente was opposed, in a time of oil glut, by those major oil companies that wanted to bar greater Western European reliance on SU gas.

A major "threat" posed by SU gas and oil may have been that with the SU exluded from the capitalist club--i.e., cartel--and with nationalist rather than strict profit motives, the SU could not be trusted to hold down production and hold up prices when "appropriate." I.e., US fear of West European "dependence" on SU energy might have been not so much fear that the SU would withhold energy supplies at critical times but that it would not withhold production and supplies when that was necessary to maintain the price. It was a threat to the profits of the oil companies, not to the purchaser's requirements for energy. It might have made oil too available to those who needed it. It was not only a competitor--and one whose state control might tempt other nations to nationalise--but an uncontrollable rival. This threat, going back to the Bolshevik nationalisation of Rothschild oil properties (in Baku?) might lie at the heart of Western hostility to Bolshevism. (An irony: perhaps SU's threat was not so much to "multilateral free trade," "unfettered pure competition," as to cartel control of energy prices and profits," then as now energy being Russia's major export commodity.

On the other hand, Ferguson points out, those who wanted to seel things to the Soviet Union found the SU's purchasing power limited by the amount of gas and oil it could sell, which was affected by the state of detente. (See Reagan's fight against West German support for a gas pipeline, and againts the sale of oil-drilling equipment, all on the excuse of the CW). How will all this show up now?

"Even since the Bolshevik Revolution, the leaders of the capitalist world have made the most of communism by putting it in quarantine as the horrible example, the pariah, warning the world of the dangers of nonfonformity and, by contrast, glorifying the dominant system. The zeal for condemning and excluding anti-capitalist experiments continues with boycotts and embargoes gainst Vietnam, Cuba and Nicaragua."

One can now compare US "LIC" against Nicaragua with our policy

in the large toward the SU. In both cases, the "fear of a good example" (Chomsky), and US preference for a hardline, ominous regime so long as the opposing system couldn't be overthrown: both to justify US conflictual pressures, and to serve as a warning to possible imitators, a deterrent.

In the case of Nicaragua, the US desire that the opposing regime waste its resources on mobilization and an arms race is clear, serving both the above purposes and also draining public support in hopes of overthrow (hopes now achieved, in Nicaragua as, it seems likely, in the Soviet Union, as well as East Europe). That has long been suspected as a motive of US policy with respect to the Soviet Union; the "new thinkers" in the SU directly charged it in recent years--a basis for SU opposition to the US SDI or to imitating it--and it increasingly seems to have been explicit in the minds of at least some Reagan and Bush officials.

Thus, the threat of invasion or attack has always been maintained. The implicit threat of US acquiescence or participation in a West German penetration of East Germany in support of an East German uprising (or, of unification) has been maintained (even though the presence of US troops functions, perhaps even more, as a restraining influence on the West Germans; given the division of Germany, the Soviets probably preferred the US and others to have troops in Germany). It leads to the Soviet counterthreat--not perceived as such in the Western publics, who see it as purely aggressive--of offensive reaction to any such move: with the Soviets taking no pains (why not?) to minimize such Western apprehension or avoid the resulting arms race and tension. Perhaps they did not because the arms race and tension, resulting from this Western "misinterpretation" of their concerns and purposes, was necessary to their continued occupation of East Europe and Germany, contrary to the will of the people of the region.

Early in the CW period, the US even maintained bands of "contras" in the Eastern block, both in Europe and the SU (and China): perhaps with some hopes, as in Nicaragua, of using these as provocateurs to armed intervention. But that desire seems to have vanished no later than 1956, or perhaps 1953.

We still seem to be striving for an example of "good relations" with the SU on the model of total subordination of SU policy to US preferences: at least, the price of arms agreements has been, so far, SU concession to US terms (even where the SU position makes much more sense